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ANDRE KAMENSIKOV

Conflict Management and  
Prevention Strategy for the Open  
Society Network  
With Focus on the Troubled  
Regions of the North Caucasus

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## **1. Overview.**

The future of the Newly Independent States depends to a great extent on how these countries are able to handle the existing tensions within and between them and overcome the consequences of the violent conflicts that shook many of these states over the last decade. Civil society can not be built in a country where people are in a military conflict with each-other, and more so - when the state itself wages a war on an ethnic, religious or other group, which it declares to be its citizens.

However, the scope of these problems is so huge and elements of civil society in the affected communities are so weak that it is often difficult to imagine what significant constructive role may be carried out by NGOs with their limited resources and influence – apart from direct humanitarian assistance to victims of such tragic events.

To answer this question members of Nonviolence International – NIS have looked at the actual levels of constructive grass roots activities existing in one of the most troubled areas – the North Caucasus, and began regularly informing various international organizations about these activities. There has certainly been a fair level of interest in such information. However there also are extreme difficulties that seriously hinder both the activities of local NGOs in the field and possibilities to get updated and reliable information from these troubled areas.

However, our experience allows us to come up with some conclusions about the need for conflict management activities in the conflict zones, as well as about specific directions which such activities may take.

## **2. Need for conflict management programs.**

Humanitarian programs, which under certain conditions play an important constructive role assisting victims of conflicts and the process of post-conflict recovery, nonetheless may not be seen as a substitute to programs directly aimed at conflict management objectives.

International organizations, such as the UN and the OSCE do participate in conflict resolution activities in the Newly Independent States (Abkhazia, Chechnya, Tadjikistan, etc.). However, their involvement becomes possible usually at a late stage in the conflict, since governments, as a rule, are not interested in attracting international attention to internal tensions on their territory – till these tensions lead to wide-scale violence.

There are a number of international nongovernmental organizations that have been involved in efforts to promote conflict management efforts in the Caucasus and in other areas of tension and conflict of the former USSR. These are such groups as Search for Common Ground (USA), the Berghoff Center (Germany), International Alert (Great Britain). However, most of their activities were focused at getting together and building networks of a selected group of people from the conflict zones. As a result, such a group has formed – today there are around a hundred people from different regions many of whom know each-other through various conferences,

consultations, international events, etc. The problem comes from the fact that these activities, however important, have a minimal effect on the actual populations in the conflict zones themselves. Thus it is necessary to focus on activities in the conflict regions themselves, the work that is being done by local NGOs “on ground”. This has been the major focus of the “North Caucasus NGO Monitoring Service” project.

### **3. Questions before preventive humanitarian action.**

The fact, that preventing a conflict is much more effective than dealing with its consequences is obvious. However, the problems that international agencies face in when they attempt to engage in conflict prevention efforts are many-sided.

First of all, it is always a problem in predicting where is the proper area to apply efforts, pin-pointing it among a wide range of problems and potential conflict situations.

Secondly – it is quite difficult to get serious donor support before a humanitarian disaster erupts and begins to attract significant media attention.

Third issue – it is a challenge to develop a reasonable strategy that would be feasible on the part of international organizations and would have a significant effect in terms of conflict prevention and easing tensions.

Finally, the official government in a region, where such a disaster may be reasonably expected, is often not interested in recognizing the problem and in attracting wide international attention, since it is usually either involved in a problem directly - through its actions or indirectly – by not taking necessary measures to prevent it.

### **4. Experience, gained during the implementation of the policy fellowship project.**

The experience gained through gathering and distributing information in the process of the project implementation and during the publication of the “North Caucasus NGO Monitor” provides insights into the questions raised above about the possibility of addressing conflict management and prevention issues by working with local NGOs. This experience showed a significant level of interest in information about local NGO activities in the North Caucasus among various organizations but also highlighted serious difficulties even in the process of simply obtaining reliable information from conflict regions.

On one hand – at least three electronic list-servers have been distributing the “Monitor”, so at this point it is difficult even to estimate how wide its electronic circulation is. Beside that, NI-NIS has already received about a few dozen requests from different people and organizations to be included in its mailing list. We also received a request to publish information from the “Monitor” in the Canadian magazine “Refugee”. Articles from the “Monitor” were used by representatives of

other electronic networks, such as one being currently developed among conflict management activists in Central Asia.

On the other hand – NI-NIS has been experiencing growing difficulties in obtaining reliable information about the situation in the conflict zones themselves. The biggest blow came in the beginning of May, when we found out that our primary contact in Chechnya, the head of the Chechen Social-Charitable Fund “Berkat” was abducted.

Overall, however, we may state that the experience gained through the implementation of the policy fellowship project does give us base to confirm the important role and perspectives of NGO activity in such a troubled area as the North Caucasus.

## **5. NGO activity in conflict zones – overview.**

War brings out not only the worst but also the best in humankind. Members of NI-NIS have learned through their experience in conflict zones that in such areas there are always people and groups who get engaged in various peace, human rights and humanitarian activities. This may mean trying to organize negotiations and local “cease-fires”, protecting human rights - especially rights of people belonging to the “wrong” ethnic group, providing humanitarian aid to victims and refugees, documenting human rights violations, assisting in post-conflict rehabilitation, etc.

Examples of such activity are: work, carried out by the Hasavyurt Regional Charitable Fund “Salvation” on rebuilding the normal relations between the villages along the Chechen-Dagestan border and preventing an outbreak of inter-ethnic violence during the war in Dagestan; work of a number of organizations in Chechnya on psychological rehabilitation and getting rid of “enemy images” among children and teenagers (Agency for Rehabilitation and Development, Centre for Peacemaking and Community development, Association of Conflictologists of the Stavropol Krai); developing tolerance and mutual understanding between various ethnic communities in the city of Kislovodsk, etc. The fellowship project allowed not only to highlight the work of such organizations, but in some cases - to assist their activities.

These small local organizations and groups (and in some cases - individual activists) are “insiders” in the situations and must be included as essential components in the framework of any peace and tolerance-building, humanitarian and human rights activities in troubled areas. Without their cooperation various programs in humanitarian assistance, trust building, conflict prevention, human and minority rights protection run a high risk of not addressing the most important needs and concerns of the people and communities they are designed to help. Such local groups and organizations can also “open doors” for large international organizations and enable them to carry out their activities in areas, which are impossible to be reached otherwise - due to bureaucratic obstacles or unacceptably high levels of risk.

However, in their courageous work, such NGOs and activists face immense difficulties, related to their insufficient experience and financial resources, lack or poor quality of communications, high levels of risk, etc.

It is important to note that there is often a psychological "mind block" that stands in the way of developing direct cooperation between fairly large international agencies and small groups and organizations directly from the troubled areas. The former often tend to disregard the latter (not least - due to the lack of information) and either carry out all activities themselves or rely on organizations, already well known but not from the conflict regions. This is often quite costly, time consuming and does not allow to take full advantage of existing opportunities.

To show the role that local NGOs may play in conflict areas of the North Caucasus we would like to focus more precisely on some cases, which we were able to monitor throughout the fellowship project.

### **Case 1. Situation in Western Dagestan.**

This ethnic diversity in Dagestan, that is home to over 30 ethnic groups, neither of which is a clear majority, has a dual effect. On one side the ethnic diversity of Dagestan, the interconnection of cultures of the various peoples, living side by side for many centuries, developed certain norms of behavior. These norms in the past years helped to avoid any serious armed conflicts in Dagestan despite the fact that tensions often ran very high. On the other side, it is precisely this diversity, combined with some elements of traditional behavior and a very troublesome history that create serious contradictions and tensions between various groups.

Economic and political power in Dagestan is seen to be linked with ethnic background. A person who reaches a powerful position is expected by society to benefit his extended family, his clan, his ethnic group. Certain areas in the economy are perceived to be controlled by official or unofficial leaders of certain ethnic groups. Obviously in such an environment the struggle for power may easily transform in to an inter-ethnic conflict, as various political leaders will try to mobilize their support bases.

Most of the people in Dagestan felt compassion toward the Chechen people during the war in Chechnya. Many considered this war to be a national - liberation movement of the Chechen people. From the first days of the war the population of Dagestan actively participated in an anti-war movement<sup>1</sup>, people demonstrated, blocked roads and did not allow the federal troops to enter Chechnya from Dagestan. The government and people of Dagestan did what they could to assist refugees from Chechnya.

Unfortunately, the refugees themselves have done a lot of damage to their own reputation. Buildings where they staid, such as plants or nurseries, have been completely wrecked, and there were a number of cases when refugees who lived in peoples homes engaged in illegal activities, after what their hosts have suffered.

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<sup>1</sup> Obviously, the most active anti-war movement developed in the areas bordering Chechnya where there is a large population of Akkin-Chechens.

Despite Dagestan's opposition toward the war in Chechnya, on January 9, 1996 the Dagestan city of Kizlyar became the object of a terrorist attack by a few hundred Chechen fighters, lead by Salman Raduev<sup>2</sup>.

The Kizlyar tragedy united all the ethnic groups of Dagestan, weakened the contradictions between them. At the same time it led to an increase in anti-Chechen feelings among the Dagestan population. These anti-Chechen feelings spread to the Akkin-Chechens, who live in Dagestan. Many people see the Akkin-Chechens as proponents of Chechen separatism.

Gradually anti-Chechen feelings began to diminish but after the signing of the peace agreements in Hasavyurt on August 26, 1996, when military activities in Chechnya ended and were replaced by a fragile peace, when one should expect the situation to stabilize, anti-Chechen feelings again began to grow. Raids have been constantly taking place from the Chechen territory onto neighboring Dagestan districts during which cattle and cars got stolen, robberies took place, hostages were taken in order to extort money and so on. The representatives of all nationalities of Dagestan suffered from these criminal activities.

Tensions were further fueled by statements of some Chechen field commanders that the Hasavyurt and the Novolak (Auhovski) districts are ancient Chechen territory<sup>3</sup>.

Such tensions and contradictions created serious tensions around approximately 100,000 Chechens who are permanent residents of Dagestan and live mainly near the Chechen-Dagestan border. They are called the Akkin-Chechens.

These contradictions have seriously exacerbated the already existing dispute over the Novolak (Auhov) district – an area just south of Hasavyurt, from where Chechens were deported in 1944.

There was no Novolak district before 1943, its territory belonged to the Hasavyurt area. In 1943 part of the territory of the Hasavyurt area was designated as the Auhovski district, populated mainly by the Akkin-Chechens. In February 1944, after the deportation of all the Chechens, the Auhovski district was abolished. Instead of it, the Novolak district was formed to which 1300 Lak families were moved in March of 1944 from the Lak and Kulin districts of Dagestan.

In the process of deportation all the Akkin-Chechens were allowed to take were some clothes and a small amount of food. Cattle, property, houses - all of that was left behind. A large percent of the deported died in the first few years during deportation.

In 1957, after the deported peoples were allowed to return to their homelands, the Akkin-Chechens returned, but they were not permitted to go back to the Novolak district, formed in the place of the Auhovski district. Instead they were given land in the nearby Hasavyurt district.

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<sup>2</sup> *The Chechen fighters claimed that initially there was no plan to attack the city and the objective of the operation was to destroy a helicopter airfield located next to the city and a military garrison. However on the airfield there were only two helicopters and the garrison organised a fierce resistance, after which the fighters entered the city in order to take hostages and use them to secure a safe passage to Chechnya.*

<sup>3</sup> *Like the statement made by Aslan Mashadov (at the time - the Chief of staff of the Chechen military formations during the war presently – the President of Chechnya) when he referred to the Dagestan city of Hasavyurt as “the ancient Vainakh land”.*



Since 1957 there were some rather serious collisions between the Akkin-Chechens and the Lak's and in 1991-1993 contradictions between them have increased. The Akkin-Chechens wanted to return to the homes of their ancestors. The Lak's were not against this in principle, but they demanded that the government of Dagestan should first allocate territory and finance the construction of towns and villages for the Lak's to move to.

On the third congress of the national deputies of Dagestan in 1991 a decision was made to create an organizing committee for the restoration of the Auhovski district and a commission on the resettlement of the Lak population of the Novolak district.

A governmental program was accepted: a territory of 8,500 hectares (21,000 acres) in the Kumtorkalinski district near Mahachkala was allocated for the new Lak towns and villages to be built. 3150 Lak families were supposed to move there. The resettlement program for the Lak people should have been completed in 1996, but due to shortages in financing only around 25% of the resettlement program has been accomplished so far. Since the Lak can not move from the Novolak district this means that the program of restoring the Auhovski district can not be implemented. The Akkin-Chechens propose to restore the Auhovski district before the Lak move out. But the Lak demand that the process of restoring the Auhovski district and the resettlement of the Lak should happen at the same time. Tensions have continued to grow.

In this already extremely tense environment in September 1999 a large part of the Novolak district of Dagestan was attacked and temporarily occupied by armed terrorists that came from Chechnya under extremist Islamic slogans. As various ethnic movements in Dagestan have formed their own armed militia units under the pretext of fighting the invaders, a serious danger developed around the Akkin-Chechens, who faced a real danger of turning into scapegoats for the rest of the Dagestan population.

The fighting that took place in some western districts of Dagestan between intruders from neighboring Chechnya and the federal troops together with the Dagestan militia, provoked to a rapid growth of tensions between most of the local population and the local Chechen community. Despite the fact the overwhelming majority of the Akkin-Chechens denounced the invasion and stated that they were ready to fight in order to protect their homes together with other peoples of Dagestan most Dagestan people were very suspicious of their real position. Certain incidents were reported in the media of some local Chechens supporting the invaders. Though these were a few separate incidents and they were often not verified, they have contributed to the wave of negative attitudes toward the Chechens in Dagestan.

As the federal forces (who were backed by the Dagestan militia) drove out the invaders from Chechnya, incidents were reported of the looting and burning down Chechen houses by some groups of the Dagestan militia. At the same time leaflets were being spread around Dagestan calling on a total and irreversible deportation of the local Chechen population. Following are some excerpts from these leaflets:

**“...Today we say – enough! It is time to resist! Chechens have no place in Dagestan, in the Caucasus, in Russia.** Force them out from everywhere. Let's organize a people's deportation of 1944, which they have forgotten. Let them travel without any homeland or shelter. In all Chechen villages organize pogroms, take away their property and houses. Our refugees will need this. **Demand that Chechens be**

**fired from all administrative, management and business positions.** Remember people, it is with the hope on them that bandits crossed our border...” It is unclear, what particular organization or group prepared and distributed such leaflets, however the damage was done.

All these events created a situation when an inter-ethnic conflict in Dagestan seemed not only possible but highly probable. Some leaders of the Avar community have also made provocative statements (Avars are the largest ethnic group in Dagestan, about 30% of the total population of the republic).

However, as this situation has escalated, certain NGO activities were carried out in order to prevent an outbreak of violence. An important role in this belonged to the fact that there already has been an active local NGO “on the scene”, among the Dagestan Chechen population, which had contacts with a number of organizations in Russia and internationally. This was the Dagestan Regional Charitable Fund “SOS-Salvation” (formerly – the Hasavyurt Regional Charitable Fund “Salvation”), which we wrote about in a number of issues of the “Monitor”.

At the very beginning of the fighting in the Novolaksky district of Dagestan a group of NGOs from various NIS states signed a letter to the Russian, Dagestan and local authorities, calling on them to take all necessary measures to avoid hostilities against the local Chechen population. This took place on a meeting of NGOs involved in conflict management and prevention activities in the Central Asian city of Alma-Aty, Kazakhstan. Though most of the organizations on that meeting came from Central Asian states, a number of them have known the “SOS-Salvation” Fund through various events (such as the meeting of the NGO Working Group on conflict management and prevention in November 1998 or the Steering Group meeting of the CIS Conference on refugees). Thus, they were able to understand the dangers of the situation and take action.

This statement had two important effects:

First of all, it was the first such warning that came from a number of organizations from various countries.

Secondly, it showed to the Dagestan Chechens, that there are people and organizations internationally, who know about their situation and are concerned about it. This gave people hope that their problems may be solved in a nonviolent way, and mobilized Dagestan Chechens around Umar Djavtaev – a moderate and balanced NGO leader.

Second action on the part of NGOs came as a response to an attempt of the mayor of the city of Hasavyurt to expel from town all people who are residents of Chechnya. An order to do so was signed by the Hasavyurt administration on September 10<sup>th</sup>. The problem was that in Hasavyurt there still have been a couple thousand Chechens who came as refugees during the 1994-96 war, and had nowhere to leave. If an effort would be made to expel them by force, it could spark violence in the city of Hasavyurt and evolve into a conflict between the police and militia forces and the local Chechen population.

In response to an urgent call from Hasavyurt, the Moscow-based NGO Nonviolence International (also affiliated with a network of organizations internationally) had contacted some Deputies of the Russian State Duma (the Lower House of the Russian Parliament) and urged them to take action. Such action was taken, and a number of officials from the federal government had contacted the local

and republican authorities. As a result the demand for all nonresident Chechens to leave Hasavyurt was revoked. This episode got coverage in one of the national TV news broadcasts.

During the same days a group of members of the Moscow-based Human Rights Center “Memorial” had undertaken a field trip to Dagestan, researching the situation there and encouraging local authorities to stop human rights violations in the aftermath of the fighting. The presence of outside observers on the scene had an important effect in terms of promoting the local officials to put an end to unlawful practices in the aftermath of the conflict.

Both “Memorial” and Nonviolence International kept in close contact with Umar Djavtaev – the leader of the “Salvation” Fund during the days of the conflict. This for the time being gave the “Salvation” Fund an important unofficial position among the local Chechen population and increased the influence of this organization among its own people. As a consequence, NGOs were able to successfully work with the local Chechen community. In fact they were able to consult, through the “Salvation” Fund, the leadership of the Dagestan Chechens about effective strategies of behavior in these tense situations. For example, they helped in editing statements made by the National Council of Dagestan Chechens in a way that they could not be perceived as containing threats. This is quite important, because for people caught up in a very threatening and tense situations it is difficult to objectively judge how their actions and statements are perceived by the hostile part of the population.

When the above mentioned leaflet calling for the deportation of all Chechens from Dagestan was released, both members of “Memorial” and of Nonviolence International immediately contacted a number of Russian MP’s and urged them to speak to high ranking Russian officials about this dangerous development of the situation. Such conversations took place and as we have been informed – the situation around the Dagestan Chechens was discussed between federal and republican authorities.

Finally, the “Salvation” Fund was provided by some small but important financial aid for two purposes: to have stable and reliable communications, and thus continue to provide up to date information about the developments in the Hasavyurt area of Dagestan; to purchase a high quality copy machine, in order to (if necessary) produce leaflets and communicate to the local population directly, counteracting any possible calls for violence.

Whether influenced by all these efforts or not, but on September 14th the Chairman of the State Council of Dagestan, Magomed Ali Magomedov made a strong statement in defense of the Dagestan Chechens that was broadcasted throughout the republic. This statement (though it had come a bit late) had a positive effect on the development of the situation. It became certain that most Dagestan authorities were not interested in the development of a new inter-ethnic conflict on the territory of their republic, though certain local “strong men” may have for a while considered this as a possibility. The situation had gradually eased somewhat, though the risk of such an inter-ethnic conflict has not gone away completely.

Currently a project is beginning to be implemented that should use the process of restoring houses destroyed during the war in order to unite representatives of various ethnic groups who live in and around the areas effected by military action. The “SOS-Salvation” Fund is currently organizing groups of builders of various

ethnic background (including local Chechens) to work together on restoring the damaged homes. This would also be based on the local tradition of “peoples construction” - when local communities unite to help people who require assistance. If this effort is successful – it will be another important confidence building step, which will further diminish the possibilities of inter-ethnic violence in the region.

Analyzing the work carried out in Dagestan to prevent an inter-ethnic conflict developing as a consequence of the fighting that took place, we believe that this is a rare case when we have evidence to prove that conflict prevention activities by NGOs may be effective. Obviously it would be wrong to say that a war was prevented exclusively due to NGO activities in the area, just as it is impossible even in principle to be sure of what could have happened if certain actions had not been taken. However, there is clear evidence of the effect of NGO involvement in this particular case:

- NGOs were the first to speak out about the danger of inter-ethnic violence breaking out (in spite of a prevailing attitude of “patriotic” hysteria in the Russian and Dagestan media as well as among the public).
- The NGO leader who did not have any official position, clearly became the unofficial leader of the Chechen community in Dagestan during the days of the conflict. Local Chechens, including those who held important official positions in the republican government turned to him for help.
- Moscow-based NGOs, who knew the situation in the region and received the alarming information were able to convene their concerns to federal authorities, and get them to take action – at least in the form of calls and conversations with the Dagestan leadership.
- The leaders of the local Chechen community were receptive to suggestions made by NGOs, and had even made changes in their statements according to NGO recommendations.
- Certain actions intended by local authorities, that may have increased tensions or even trigger violence were halted.
- The Dagestan Chechens themselves strongly believe that it was NGO efforts to avoid a conflict that brought practical results.

This important experience allows to specify some crucial factors that may be key for the success of NGO conflict management efforts:

- Presence of well-established and known local NGOs in the conflict area.
- Previous work and trust-building between “central” and local NGO.
- Knowledge, on the part of “central” NGOs of the local situation, leading to a high level of awareness about possible developments.
- Rapid response.
- Good contacts with other NGOs, federal authorities and international organizations.

## **Case 2. Situation in the Karachai-Cherkess Republic and the activities of the “Drujba” Center in Kislovodsk.**

The Karachai-Cherkess Republic in the Western part of the North Caucasus is a region that got hardly any attention before 1999. It was the presidential elections in this region which suddenly turned public attention to it. The reason was that these elections created serious inter-ethnic tensions between some of the ethnic groups, living in this republic, specifically – between the Karachai and the Cherkess-Abazin peoples (who belong to the same Adygo-Circassian ethnic group).

Tensions grew as the two opposing candidates, one of which was a Karachai and the other – a Cherkess began rallying their supporters based on ethnic grounds.

The situation got extremely tense in the summer of 1999, when the Circassians refused to accept the results of the elections, according to which the Karachai candidate won<sup>4</sup>. When the newly elected leader attempted to move in to his office he was blocked from doing so, and his inauguration did not take place in the republic’s capital. The Circassian leaders organized a congress of the Circassian peoples of the Karachai-Cherkess Republic during which they declared the emergence of a separate Chirkassian republic on some of the territories of Karachai-Cherkessia.

As a number of violent incidents involving the Karachai and Cherkess peoples took place the situation was ripe for open conflict. Both sides had weapons and both sides believed that they would have an advantage if violence broke out. The Karachai people significantly outnumber the Circassians, however the Cherkess and Abazin counted on support from neighboring regions that are populated by other peoples, belonging to the Circassian ethnic group (Kabardin, Adyg, Shapsug and Abkhaz).

However, there were also a number of factors that helped prevent, up to this day, the development of an open violent conflict.

First of all, both the Karachai and the Circassian peoples in the Karachai-Cherkess Republic are a minority, since over 40% of the population are ethnic Russians. The Russian community, strong in numbers but without a clear leadership, played a passive but stabilizing role, since neither side could count on its support.

Second, the Federal government, though late in its response, did react to the dangerous development of events and filled the republic with police forces from other areas. Attempts were made by the Federal government to negotiate a settlement, and eventually some agreements were signed between the leadership of the Karachai and the Circassian communities. These signed agreements did help in preventing a massive outbreak of violence, however they were temporary compromises that did not address the roots of the conflict and thus should not be seen as a foundation for sustainable peace.

Finally, both sides realized that the one that will be seen as provoking violence will probably lose support, thus they did show some signs of restraint and at least in words – called for a peaceful resolution of the situation.

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<sup>4</sup> *However, there was evidence of massive fraud during the election process and in nearly 20% of the voting stations the elections did not take place at all.*

Yet in the long run, nothing has been resolved. Today there is time to take preventive action and work toward a sustainable solution, however if such action is not taken violence in this region remains not only possible but highly probable.

### ***Possibilities for NGO action:***

In November 1999 the project manager took a trip to Karachai-Cherkessia to study the possibilities of conflict management and prevention work being carried out through local NGOs. This trip was organized together with a number of other NGO representatives – members of the Caucasus NGO Forum.

Though limited in time, this field trip allowed to come up with some conclusions about the possibilities of conflict prevention work in the republic.

First of all, the whole NGO sector is still very poorly developed in the republic, even compared to the troubled regions of the North Caucasus. This confirms the sad theory that it is violence and human suffering that often inspires civil activity in response.

However, on the other hand there were people in both the official structures and in the various national movements, who clearly were trying to search for a peaceful solution to the tense situation. And there were obvious steps that could be taken to promote dialogue and contribute to the search for a sustainable solution.

Compared with the crisis situation in Dagestan, the situation in Karachai-Cherkess Republic needs not as much intensive “high profile” action in response to today’s events, but a long term strategy including the involvement of various international organizations and NGOs in the search for a sustainable peace.

Another important aspect in dealing with situations like the one in the Karachai-Cherkess Republic is working with public organizations that may not be considered traditional NGOs in the “western” sense, but that nonetheless play an important role in the unfolding events. These are such organizations as different “national movements”, such as the Karachai “Alan” society, the Cherkess “Adyge-Has”, the Abazin “Abazshta”, etc. Though these national movements may be seen as one of the major causes of the problem, they may as well play a crucial role in the search for a solution.

By carefully bringing such organizations into various NGO events, forums, etc., we may promote their leadership to behave in a more constructive and open-minded way.

### ***Kislovodsk.***

The city of Kislovodsk is located in the Stavropol region, 3 miles from the border of the Karachi-Cherkess Republic. It is a very multi-cultural city with different large ethnic communities.

As tensions began building up in neighboring Karachai-Cherkessia they inevitably had an effect on the situation in Kislovodsk, which has a large Karachai community and a fair Circassian one. Tensions between these two communities began to grow, and there was a real threat that if open violence breaks out in the neighboring republic it could spill over into the streets of Kislovodsk.

In this situation a crucial role was played by a local NGO, the inter-ethnic, Center “Drujba” – a local NGO that is an “umbrella” for a number of local cultural societies of the various ethnic communities. A number of round tables of the leaders of most local ethnic communities were organized by this NGO on which the leaderships of both the Karachai and the Cherkess societies eventually were able to find common ground. As a result, the local community leaders began not only to work together to ease tensions in Kislovodsk, but also wrote a joint appeal to the people of Karachai-Cherkessia. In this appeal they called on the people of Karachai-Cherkessia, the republican authorities and the candidates for presidency to do everything possible to prevent another inter-ethnic conflict, to put an end to various terrorist and criminal actions and to secure peace in their republic. This appeal was published in the local media, it was sent to the leaderships of the various ethnic movements in the Karachai-Cherkess Republic and it was published in one of the republican newspapers.

This example illustrates the fact, that work properly carried out with the support of NGOs with various ethnic movements may help transfer them from a factor of tension into a factor of stability. The example of Kislovodsk and the activities of the “Drujba” Center may serve as an important guideline for serious NGO attempts to constructively influence the situation in Karachai-Cherkessia. And the local Karachai and Cherkess societies may help “open doors” for NGOs and international organizations who want to establish communications with the different ethnic movements in that Republic.

### **Case 3. Chechnya**

The Chechen Republic today is clearly the most violent and complex in the entire Newly Independent States. The population is caught between two military forces both of which do not care the least about the lives and the well-being of ordinary people.

On one side these are well armed extremist militant groups lead by former field commanders, who engage in counterfeiting, kidnapping and other criminal activity, terrorizing parts of their own population, neighboring regions, journalists and even international organizations.

On the other side come the activities of the Russian Federal government, which so far was unable to bring to justice any prominent terrorists, but is using its armed forces to wage a war on practically all of Chechnya and its police to discriminate against Chechen people all around Russia.

During the process of preparing the “North Caucasus NGO Monitor” we have attempted to cover ongoing NGO activities in Chechnya. However, we also found ourselves highlighting the extreme difficulties that NGO activists face in this region. Even the process of simply obtaining information from the conflict region encountered some serious obstacles.

Abuzar Sumbulatov, our primary contact in Chechnya, a professor of Islamic studies at the local University and the head of the Chechen Social – Charitable Fund “Berkat” was abducted from his house at the end of April. His fate is still unknown.

We believe that he suffered for his outspoken position against various extremist groups that developed in Chechnya over the past years.

Yet despite this tragic story, there was considerable NGO activity in Chechnya continuing till the breakout of the new war, which began in the fall. Chechen NGOs were mainly involved in various programs, aimed at recovery and rehabilitation after the war of 1994-96.

Today some of these groups have moved to neighboring Ingushetia and are continuing their activities in refugee camps in that republic.

Certain changes have to be made in terms of the ways in which information is obtained for the "Monitor". Initially, the plan was to provide a number of local NGOs in the various regions of the North Caucasus with the necessary means to regularly communicate and to become "communication points" for obtaining information for the publication. However, since the project proposal was written, the situation in the region had continuously deteriorated, thus the only way of obtaining information was by selecting certain individuals to be responsible for collecting information for it.

In the interim project report we wrote: "In Chechnya and Ingushetia it is reasonable to support practically any constructive activities, carried out by local actors, but on a very modest scale. As previously stated, the real objective must be not so much the proposed goals of the activities themselves, but simply maintaining the network of activists." Today we can state that it in a sense is "payoff time" for any such investments made in the development of the NGO sector of Chechnya and Ingushetia. International organizations are certainly interested in providing aid to people who suffer from the unfolding humanitarian tragedy. But on one hand they are threatened by the sad history of kidnappings and killings of international staff in the North Caucasus, on the other – they encounter difficulties obtaining the necessary permits from the federal government. Thus, it is those who have maintained contacts and at least some level of activity in the area (what was possible for the last years only through local NGOs) who are now leading the humanitarian effort in the region.

## **6. CIS Conference NGO Working Group on conflict management and prevention.**

One of the main activities throughout the implementation of the fellowship project was the active involvement in the development of the *NGO Working Group on conflict management and prevention of the CIS Conference on Refugees and Involuntarily Displaced Persons*.

This Working Group, created last year to a large extent due to the activities of Nonviolence International has received funding from UNHCR in 1999. Unfortunately this funding was allocated only for "institutionalizing" this Working Group, what provided for networking but did not provide support for actual "on-ground" activities toward conflict management and prevention. Due to an active position in the Geneva meetings of Nonviolence International representatives as well as other NGOs, the official goal of the Working Group was shifted from "building networks of NGOs working in the field of conflict management and prevention" to "supporting conflict management and prevention activities of NGOs" what included "assisting NGOs in



designing and implementing projects, aimed at conflict management and prevention”. A UNHCR representative was influenced to make a commitment that future funding of the Working Group will include support for actual conflict management and prevention activities, not just networking and holding meetings.

In July 1999 the OSI fellow presented ideas about increasing the conflict management and prevention impact of the OSI East-East program during a meeting of East-East program coordinators in Bratislava, Slovakia. One of the consequences of this presentation was the developed interest among the program coordinators in the NGO Working Group on Conflict Management and Prevention. As a result in November 1999 the East-East program supported the November meeting of this Working Group. This ensured the wide participation in the meeting of people from various conflict areas with practical experience of NGO conflict management and prevention activities.

As a result important practical decisions were made about the structure and strategy of the Working Group, including a decision to formulate a CIS strategy of NGO involvement in conflict management and resolution activities. A wide range of practical ideas about conflict management programs that maybe implemented through local NGOs was formulated in this meeting. Thus, the NGO Working Group is beginning to develop as a unique network, uniting CIS and international organizations, researchers and practitioners in the field of conflict management and prevention. The important potential of this network is that it may serve not just the goal of early warning, but become a tool of early action. It would certainly be useful for the OSI to continue supporting and cooperating with this Working Group.

## **7. Directions for conflict management activities within the OSI framework.**

Based on the experience, gained during the implementation of the project, it is possible to provide certain recommendation about specific steps, which could be taken to support conflict management and prevention efforts in troubled areas of the North Caucasus. These recommendations may also have relevance to situations in other regions of the Newly Independent States, though each area obviously has it unique sides.

It is important to make use of the framework, and mechanism being developed within the CIS Conference NGO Working Group on conflict management and prevention.

Though it is only developing, the NGO Working Group on conflict management and prevention is a the first such CIS network which unites both “on-ground” activists and researchers and is focused not only on studying the conflict situations, but more – on designing specific action plans for dealing with these problems.

One of the ideas, supported by the Working Group is the development of a CIS NGO strategy in the field of conflict management and prevention – a document that will include specific projects to be implemented by local NGO in order to ease

tensions, prevent conflicts and assist in post conflict recovery<sup>5</sup>. Such a strategy could be prepared for the next and last Steering Group Meeting of the CIS Conference in July 2000.

While the implementation of such specific “on-ground” projects would be an important step in addressing the various tensions and conflicts, an important factor during their implementation, which should not be overlooked is adequately highlighting such activities. It is also important to try analyzing the practical impact of these projects and programs, though this is certainly a very difficult task since it is impossible to measure such impact directly.

Another important direction for activities aimed at conflict management and prevention is the development of a small fund to support NGO rapid response to the developing conflicts and crisis situations. When there are obvious signs of the development of new conflicts and possible violence, local NGOs who are able directly influence the situation must be able to do their most. For that, they may require reliable communications (such as satellite phones), other equipment (such as copy machines), funds for travel, for organizing meetings between community representatives, etc. Representatives of other organizations such as well known human rights organizations, or qualified mediators might also play an important constructive role in preventing violence. For that there must be funds to assist their visits to the troubled areas.

Third direction is capacity building for conflict management NGOs from troubled areas. Today NGOs from these regions face certain disadvantages when they try to participate in existing NGO capacity development programs. This is due to poor communications with these regions, problems with transportation, the fact that foreigners often hesitate to visit such regions and thus – do not feel capable of properly monitoring NGO activities in them.

An important task is to assess what may be done to increase the “conflict management component” of already existing programs. It is important to understand that conflict management and prevention does not have to be understood literally – often a program which never mentions conflict management may actually do much more for this cause than one that stipulates conflict management as its objective. For example – working with different categories of people who have gone through a war, assisting their medical and psychological rehabilitation – such activities may be viewed as humanitarian. But they may actually do more in terms of conflict management than a training seminar on conflict management itself. The reason is that qualified work with peoples minds may help them get away from the black and white stereotypes, which form in conflict situations, while a training seminar may give some general information about how to negotiate, etc., but will not affect the internal motivation of the people involved.

Further we provide a list of recommendations to various OSI network programs about how this may be done. Since many OSI activities include holding conferences, seminars, round-tables, and trainings - it is useful to encourage the participation in such events of people coming from regions, divided by conflicts and tensions. If this is done, such events will reach two goals: besides achieving their stated objectives they will also help in restoring relationships between people on “opposing” sides. For example: if OSI is sponsoring a conference on ecological issues

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<sup>5</sup> *Examples of such projects may are included in the appendix to this paper.*

in the Caucasus, it would be useful to ensure the participation of Armenian and Azeri, Georgian and Abkhaz representatives in such an event. Then the outcome of the project will include, besides the direct proceedings of the conference, the restoration of cooperation between specialists from regions who were in conflict with each other.

Besides the CIS Conference NGO Working Group on conflict management and prevention a number of other NGO forums and networks already exist, such as the Forum on Early Warning and Early Response, the Caucasus NGO Forum, etc. It may be useful for OSI representatives to participate in the meetings of these networks. The objective is not so much in supporting the events themselves but to collect ideas and support specific projects that usually arise when people from various sides of the conflict gather at such forums. Priority must be given to programs, which are aimed directly at the communities in the conflict zones (such as media programs, joint events, facilitating communications between ordinary people, etc.).

An important aspect in dealing with conflicts in the NIS is working in regions that are not under the control of their respected governments. These are such areas as Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, Transdniester and Chechnya. In some cases NGO representatives from such areas may refuse, for political reasons, to work with the national foundations of their respected states. In order to overcome this problem it may be useful to expand the framework of various international and network programs what could allow addressing some of the issues in such regions which national foundations can not currently address.

***Recommendations for certain OSI network programs on strengthening their “conflict management component”:***

#### **Arts and Culture Programs:**

Focus on programs that involve communication between members of the arts and cultural communities from areas of conflicts. For example – supporting the initiative of the inter-ethnic, inter-cultural Center “Drujba” in Kislovodsk to hold a Youth Creativity Festival of the peoples of the North Caucasus (a similar initiative has already been carried out by the “Drujba” Center in 1992). Other initiatives could help “bring out the voice for peace and reconciliation” of well known artists, signers, other famous people from the arts world.

#### **Center for Publishing Development and the Media Program:**

- Supporting publications, aimed at developing tolerance, inter-ethnic cooperation. Examples are the project of the “Drujba” Center in Kislovodsk to publish a newsletter “Together” or the project developed by the Association of Migrant organizations of the Stavropol Krai to publish a regional newspaper for refugees (the Stavropol Krai has the largest number of refugees and forced migrants among Russian regions).

- Promoting “positive coverage” of peoples activities in conflict areas. In every conflict there are many examples of cooperation among people of various ethnic and religious background, of courage and compassion. But these positive examples of human behavior get much less attention then the negative and tragic events taking place. Yet highlighting cases of positive behavior in the midst of conflict and war may constructively influence the situation and make the public more willing to accept compromise.

- Unfortunately, media materials often contribute to the development of conflicts rather than to their resolution. Working toward a more responsible, professional and objective media coverage of conflict situations is another conflict management angle of various media support programs.

**Children and Youth Programs,  
Public Health Programs,  
English Language Programs,  
Institute for Educational Policy,  
International Higher Education Support Program:**

The North Caucasus is one of the few regions in Russia with a high birth rate. At the same time the social conditions in the republics of the North Caucasus are significantly worse, than in other regions. Unemployment is often over 50%, especially among the youth. This creates an environment where the only job perspective for young people lies with criminal activity or participation in conflicts. Problems faced by children and youth in this region are severe. They are further aggravated by conflicts and their consequences.

Thus, it would be useful to make the North Caucasus a geographical priority for OSI programs that support in various ways youth health and education. One of the main goals would be preparing young people for today’s existing career opportunities. This may include training in computer skills and English language.

Another focus is multi-cultural education and teaching tolerance. However, further research is needed to be able to properly adapt programs on these issues that exist in Western and Eastern Europe to the unique cultural diversity in the North Caucasus.

Another major focus for children and youth programs is psychological rehabilitation work with children, traumatized by conflicts and terrorist acts. This work is relevant for both the children youth programs and for the medical programs of OSI. And if we do not take care of young people’s mental problems, caused by today’s conflicts we may expect these conflicts to repeat themselves tomorrow.

### **Constitutional and Legal Policy Institute:**

It would be useful to expand support for various human rights initiatives in the North Caucasus regions. Specifically, the experience of "Clinical legal education" could be expanded throughout the North Caucasus, since all the North Caucasus republics have some higher education institutions with law departments. As a first step – it would make sense to support the Dagestan "Center for Protection of Human Rights" which already is involved in precisely this type of activity.

### **East –East Program:**

The East-East program has a mandate that may be especially useful for promoting conflict management and prevention. Due to the program's focus on transcending national and cultural boundaries it is already playing an important role in rebuilding communication and friendships between people from various post-soviet regions.

As noted earlier, this program already was a major sponsor of the annual meeting of the NGO Working Group on Conflict Management and Prevention within the framework of the CIS Conference on Refugees and Involuntarily Displaced persons. Since this NGO Working Group today is a unique network of NGOs and researchers from different CIS states, working on conflict management it is useful to continue its support.

To strengthen the conflict management aspect of East-East projects it would be useful to prioritize projects that bring together people from countries and regions which were in conflict with each-other, and to address issues that may become direct or indirect causes of conflict (such as migrations from the mountains to the plains in the North Caucasus or distribution of water supplies in Central Asian states).

### **Economic and Business Development Program:**

The mandate of this program allows to address the social – economic conditions in the troubled areas of the North Caucasus, which are clearly the main root causes of existing conflicts and tensions. This could be done best in cooperation with some international organizations, which already have been involved in such activities in the region, such as UNHCR, UNDP and IOM. On the other side, some well established local NGOs, such as the Dagestan Regional Charitable Fund "SOS-Salvation" may assist in monitoring the implementation of local small business development programs. Finally, it might be useful to expand to the North Caucasus the Junior Achievement after-school programs.

### **Internet Program:**

Unlike in other areas where Internet access is not a serious problem, most of the towns and villages of the North Caucasus are still outside the Internet era. Thus if in other regions the main focus of the OSI Internet program is on content, for the North Caucasus developing the Internet infrastructure and “survival connectivity” still remains a major task.

There are still quite few NGOs in the North Caucasus, which have access and actively use e-mail. Besides simply technical problems, there is a lack of training opportunities “on-ground” in the field of e-mail and Internet use. Out of the NGOs highlighted in the “North Caucasus NGO Monitor” this year, only 4 –5 are actively benefiting from e-mail communication, not speaking of full Internet access.

While the practical impact of the Internet in the North Caucasus is still quite limited, it brings with itself an interesting psychological factor, that may be usefully exploited to strengthen the position of local NGOs in their respective communities. It may be a “status” factor – by providing local NGOs with Internet access, helping them set up a web page, etc. we may increase their status and help them gain respect among their communities. (During the tense situation in the Hasavyurt area of Dagestan in September – the situation we wrote about above - one of the local officials was threatened that his decisions, which contained obvious human rights violations, could be exposed internationally through the Internet. This clearly had an effect and was one of the factors, which forced to revoke decisions that could seriously aggravate the situation in the area).

One interesting project that could be supported by the Internet program in the North Caucasus may be developing internet sites on various local languages and about the various peoples living in the area.

### **Local Government and Public Service Reform Initiative:**

This program already addressed the issues of resolving multi-cultural and inter-ethnic conflicts. The focus on conflict management practices must be sustained. Also, it is important to focus on distributing the educational materials that were developed and ensuring that they are received by a wide range of community leaders in the North Caucasus.

### **Scholarship Programs:**

Taking into account the difficult conditions in the region and the limited opportunities for higher education it would be useful to give priority to scholars from the troubled areas of the North Caucasus (especially from Chechnya, Ingushetia, Karachai-Cherkessia and Dagestan).

### **Women's Program:**

In the North Caucasus women are playing an extremely active role in NGO development. Largely, this is due to the fact that opportunities for women to play an active role in their societies through official structures are quite limited. Thus it is important to actively involve and support, through the OSI Women's program such groups as the Committee of Ingush Women "Almos" the "League for the Protection of Mother and Child" in Dagestan, etc.

The OSI Women's program could also assist in "rehabilitation" of human rights and NGO activists from the troubled regions, since some times women in these local organizations are so stressed out, that they are on the verge of a total physical and psychological breakdown. Thus, the program could support some rehabilitation projects that will allow such activists to meet, exchange information in a relaxing environment and at the same time undergo necessary medical and psychological treatment.

### **Soros Documentary Fund**

The situation in conflict regions changes rapidly and properly documenting events in such areas is an important task. Though the existing conflicts usually get significant media attention – media coverage is far from complete, since it often focuses on sensational events but does not study their causes. Thus, it may be useful to increase the capacities of some local NGOs to monitor developments in their regions, especially in situations before a violent conflict had erupted.

At the same time it is important to begin collecting and filing materials of the latest history of troubled areas in the former USSR .

### ***Suggested procedure:***

To increase the positive impact of OSI activities in the field of conflict management and prevention a inter-program "Conflict Management Team" could be organized, which would include representatives of various OSI programs, projects and national foundations. Such a team would meet on a regular basis in order to analyze the "on-ground" conflict management opportunities and discuss ways in which they could be addressed by the various OSI programs. To be more effective a "Conflict Management Team" could set up a small analytical group in order to look into the conflict management/prevention impact of various existing OSI activities and develop more specific recommendations for increasing this impact. And finally, OSI could play a role in bringing ideas and projects on conflict management that are developed by local activists to the attention of various international organizations, events and funders.

**Peace is an obvious precondition for democratic changes and the development of open, civil societies in the post-communist states. Wars are sources of endless human suffering and major problems in all sectors of society. Thus, investment in peace, prevention and management of conflicts will have deep and long-term positive impacts.**

**The Open Society Institute has a unique structure that transcends national borders and supports, through various programs and in various regions the same common values of modern democratic society. Thus, the OSI network is in a unique position to play, without any serious changes in its structure and mandate, an active role in helping a sustainable peace prevail in the North Caucasus as well as in other troubled regions of the Newly Independent States.**